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AUTHOR Matsdorf, Eva
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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews literature on placement of mentally retarded students and the effects on adaptive behavior. Research cites the importance of social skills, intervention to benefit from integrated placement and touches upon the role of nonhandicapped peer trainers. Among findings noted are an increase in constructive peer interactions resulting from mainstreamed placements, imitation of modeled behavior by severely retarded children in mainstreamed settings, and increases in positive social interaction along with decreases in inappropriate behavior. The paper concludes that such benefits tend to be the result of using age appropriate nonhandciapped peer models. A three-page bibliography concludes the paper. (CL)

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THE EFFECTS OF INTEGRATED SETTINGS vs SEGREGATED SETTINGS ON THE ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR OF MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

BY EVA MATSDORF

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, P.L. 94-142 mandates that all handicapped students must be educated in the least restrictive enviromnent as possible. For the mentally retarded student population, this generally means a push from a segregated school setting, housing only mentally retarded students to an integrated setting which typically is a regular nonhandicapped public school.

The assumption held by the promoters of this law is that by placing the mentally retarded student in a least restrictive setting, the student will be exposed to a more normal population which includes models to help the mentally retarded student in the normalization process. By doing so, the adaptive behavior exhibited by most mentally retarded students will be replaced by more age appropriate behaviors.

Brinker (1985) defines a segregated school setting as

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the education of mentally retarded students in separate schools from the nonhandicapped students, and integrated school settings as the education of mentally retarded and nonhandicapped students in the same school.

The 1973 American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) has published the definition most widely used for mental retardation, and adaptive behavior (Grossman 1973). They define mental retardation as "significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior, and manifested during the developmental period", and adaptive behavior as "the effectiveness or degree with which the individual meets the standards of personal independence and social responsibility expected of his age and sultural group".

The question of educating the mentally retarded student in an integrated or segregated setting has been controversial issue in recent years, and has been a major concern to the community, special education and regular education administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

In the past it was believed that the best way to educate the mentally retarded was to provide separate schools which housed only students with similar functioning abilities. However, along with P.L. 94-142,

the 1970's saw a turnabout where mentally retarded students began being educated in regular nonhandicapped public schools.

There appears to be two standing theories as to whether the act of integrating mentally retarded students and nonhandicapped students by physical presence only results in a decrease of adaptive behaviors from the mentally retarded students. Strain and Shores (1983) state that an absence of instruction leads to an absence of skill, and that the consequence of mainstreaming or integrating is not a decrease in the social and adjustment problems of the retarded, rather it is a consequence of instruction in social skills only. In support is this theory, Walker (1983) also finds that retarded children need to be actively, socially participating with his or her nonhandicapped peers to acquire the social skills and to develop a social competence. He feels that at present, the retarded are not participating at sufficient levels with nonhandicapped to achieve the goal of acquiring social skills through observation of nonhandicapped peer models. The strongest supporter for this theory is Gresham (1984) qho maintains that the concept of

mainstreaming is based on three faulty assumptions, two of which are that physical placement of handicapped students in regular classrooms will (1) result in increased and more positive social interactions between handicapped children and their nonhandicapped peers, and (2) result in handicapped children modeling the socially appropriate hahaviors of their nonhandicapped peers.

On the other hand, Brady, McEvoy, Gunter, Shores, and Fox (1984) believe that a segregated setting provides considerably less naturally occuring opportunities for social interaction. They support the role of nonhandicapped peer trainers for the following reasons: (1) peers may promote across setting generalization, and (2) behavior change brought about by other children may be more durable in the absence of adults. Along this same line, it is pointed out be Wacker (1984) that the benefits of using nonhandicapped peers are (1) they are more easily trained to model acceptable behavior than are other handicapped peers, (2) they are usually the same age as the target student, providing for a more realistic training program, (3) they can be effective and may greatly reduce the

training time needed from professionals, and (4) the peer usually provides training in the natural context of the calssroom setting.

A study to determine the increase or decrease in specific behaviors of handicapped students in a mainstreamed setting was conducted by Wang, Peverly, and Randolph (1984). The subjects were sixty-nine handicapped students (which included educable mentally retarded students) located in twenty-six mainstreamed classes. Data was taken on the behaviors of the handicapped students in the fall, winter, and spring of the same year. Their findings show that constructive peer interactions increased for the mainstreamed students from fall to spring, and disruptive behavior of the special education students mainstreamed decreased from fall to spring.

In an early study, Marburg, Houston, and Holmes (1976) used thirty-two retarded children (IQ range of 20-45) and randomly assigned each to two treatment conditions, single model condition, and multiple model condition. The experimenters never instructed the subjects to imitate the behaviors. One group was trained by the same experimenter, one group was trained by multiple experimenters, as was one group given only one behavior

and the other group was given multiple behaviors. The study showed that severly retarded children did indeed tend to imitate a modeled behavior whether or not the behavior being modeled was reinforced. They also showed that the retarded children generalized the nonreinforced model behaviors, even when multiple models were used. The models used for this study, however, were adult trainers, so it would be difficult to speculate whether these results could be generalized to be the same if nonhandicapped peers were used.

A study done in support of the argument that handicapped children may learn new behaviors by imitating nonhandicapped peers was done by Brinker and Thorpe (1983). The study had 245 severly handicapped students moving into integrated school settings participate. Their adaptive behaviors were recorded and the results indicate that not only are integrated settings more conducive to social interactions of severly handicapped students than segregated settings, but they laughed more, smiled more, and interactions were more positive than in segregated settings.

Similar studies show the positive social interactions created by integration. Gampel, Gottleib, and Harrison (1974), and Brinker (1985) both observed mentally

retarded students before integration into a nonhandicapped school and after, paying special attention to social interaction and adaptive behavior. Both results show that inappropriate behavior on the part of the mentally retarded child decreased when in the integrated setting, behavior was being modeled after those labeled as nonhandicapped, and hostile-aggressive behaviors decreased. Pipe, Redman, and White (1983) used part time integration (attendance in a segregated school with mainstreaming into a nonhandicapped school for part of their school day) to show that social behavior increased during integration, and this behavior transfered over to generalize to other situations. The behaviors the mentally retarded students were learning from their nonhandicapped models in the integrated setting were transfering and being used when they were in their segregated setting.

The findings are conclusive as to the benefits of servicing mentally retarded students in integrated settings. Adaptive behavior appears to decrease, and appropriate social interactions appear to increase. These findings tend to be a result solely from the use of age appropriate nonhandicapped peer models.

Though research has been limited, it has dealt with varying degrees of integration ranging from bringing nonhandicapped students to the special schools for part of the day, having self-contained special classes housed in regular public schools with mainstreaming for lunch and playground only, to housing in public schools with actual mainstreaming into classes. Varying degrees of the handicapping condition has also been looked at from the educable mentally retarded, to the trainable mentally retarded, to the severely-profoundly mentally retarded.

All indications suggest that more research be conducted in all areas and specifically for various age levels and past years spent in segregated settings.

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